

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A3NEW YORK TIMES
27 June 1986

Israelis Criticized on Immunity Grant

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Special to The New York Times

JERUSALEM, June 26 — Israel's President and Cabinet came under a barrage of criticism today from lawyers, politicians and citizens' groups for their move to allow the head of Israel's domestic intelligence service to escape investigation in the slayings of two captured Palestinian hijackers.

The Cabinet announced Wednesday that the head of the agency, which is roughly equivalent to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, had been allowed to resign in exchange for immunity in the case. Three aides were also granted immunity, but were allowed to keep their jobs.

Today, the Israeli press, from the far right to far left, denounced Prime Minister Shimon Peres, President Chaim Herzog and Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir for their handling of the incident, variously describing them as a behaving like a "junta" and engaging in a Watergate-style cover-up and conspiracy. The language was of a sort rarely seen in Israeli newspapers.

Among the other reactions, two Tel Aviv lawyers filed a petition with the Israeli High Court of Justice today, asking the judges to nullify the amnesty granted Wednesday by President Herzog to Avraham Shalom, the chief of Shin Beth, the domestic intelligence service, and the three deputies, in exchange for Mr. Shalom's resignation.

Accused of a Cover-Up

Investigators had said the Shin Beth chief ordered the killings of two captured Palestinian bus hijackers in April 1984, then covered up the affair with the help of his three deputies. In light of the presidential pardon, the Attorney General, Yosef Harish, called off all investigations into the case — even though Israeli press reports have suggested that Mr. Shamir, who was Prime Minister when the hijacking and killings took place, gave some kind of approval for the cover-up. His involvement remains unclarified by either himself or the courts.

There were signs today that the affair could turn into a political crisis that could threaten the coalition. Many members of the Labor Party are in an uproar over Mr. Peres's participation in the decision. They are demanding

that an investigation be carried out and that, at least, the charges that Mr. Shamir was involved in the cover-up be examined.

Mr. Peres indicated today that while he believed the Shin Beth men had to be dealt with the way they were — to preserve the nation's security and the intelligence services — he would not object to an "examination of the responsibility and decisions of the political echelon." Government sources said this was a clear hint that Mr. Peres was ready to have his and Mr. Shamir's roles in the affair examined.

Planning Inquiry Demand

Energy Minister Moshe Shahal, of the Labor Party, announced that he would bring a demand for such an inquiry before the Cabinet on Sunday. The move has the support of the entire Labor Party. Labor officials say the matter must be resolved before Mr. Shamir assumes the prime ministership, as he is scheduled to do in October according to his power-sharing agreement with Mr. Peres.

The Likud bloc published a statement accusing Labor members who want an inquiry of "harming the President, the Government and the rule of law."

Mr. Shamir himself told reporters: "I hope this criticism will disappear in the next few days. I oppose the establishment of an inquiry committee."

The matter is expected to reach a crisis point at the Cabinet session Sunday. The liberal Shinui Party, which is represented in the Cabinet by Communications Minister Amnon Rubinstein, announced that unless the Cabinet agrees to a commission of inquiry at its meeting Sunday, Shinui will pull out of the coalition. This alone would not bring the Government down, but it would upset its delicate balance between pro-Labor and pro-Likud elements.

The two Tel Aviv lawyers — David Yiftah and Moshe Maroz — who appealed to the High Court of Justice today, against the President and Minister of Police Chaim Bar-Lev, argued that the amnesty was made without legal authority.

While the President has the right to give amnesty to criminals, the lawyers argued, this can only be done after the courts have completed their work and

convicted someone — a process that was ignored in this case. The amnesty appears to have been given on the basis of political considerations, the lawyers contended. The court will announce shortly whether it will consider the lawyers' appeal.

In another protest, Dedi Tzucker, a leader of the Citizens Rights Movement, announced that he was going to the President to request a "blanket amnesty, just in case I ever get involved in criminal charges."

Public Opinion Shifts

Since the decision was announced, the mood of the Israeli public has undergone something of a shift — which apparently caught the Cabinet off guard. Since the revelations about the two Palestinians' deaths came to light last month, the Israeli public has not seemed to be particularly exercised about the case.

But there has been a general discomfort about the charges that members of the security services lied and made it seem that a distinguished senior army officer, Brig. Gen. Yitzhak Mordechai, had been responsible for the deaths. General Mordechai interrogated the two bus hijackers before turning them over alive to Shin Beth.

"Much like Watergate," said an Israeli political theorist, Shlomo Avineri, "the public is more upset about the cover-up and the idea that the rule of law is being subverted, than they are about the original crime."

The normally right-of-center daily Hadaashot said in an editorial that Cabinet ministers behaved like "a worried junta in a remote South American country, looking for a way to remove the rope from its neck."

"There was Shamir," Hadaashot added, "who fought for his right like a lion not to be questioned or investigated. And there was Peres, who looked out on how his Government is sinking into a dung heap of miserable decisions and inadequacies. And the Attorney General was also there. That nice man who will do anything to please and was finally exposed as an empty vessel. How unfortunate that even the President joined in and turned his right of amnesty into a tool of politicians. This bunch does not represent the rule of law. They represent the use of law only in order to preserve themselves."